

# LITERARINESS IN THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ALBANIAN LITERATURE

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## Abstract

This article tries to show the emergence of literariness in the first literary works of the Albanian literature, which commenced as missionary and also bibliolatrous works. Several chrestomathies have been used to illustrate these works such as: chrestomathies of sections in prose from the “Missal” by Gjon Buzuku, the first written Albanian book (1555, a translation of the Catholic missal); chrestomathies of the verses of Budi, who was the first fosterer of the long-lasting poetry (1618-1621), adaptations and renovations of the biblical poems), and chrestomathies from “The platoon of prophets” (1685) by Bogdani ( a renovation in prose and poetry based on the biblical theme). These literary works surpassed their own mission and gave birth to literariness. This has to be reasoned within some aspects that are analysed separately as a result of the study, but which actually seem to be interchangeable. This analysis is carried in the framework of the inquiry which gives the proportion between literariness and its mission in the early Albanian literature ( a topic which is being the centre of the literary Albanian criticism nowadays) and helps bring the history of the Albanian literature to a different point of view, focusing on the issue of how much the art of literature has served itself as art.

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**Keywords:** Literariness, bibliolatrous works of literature , history of the Albanian literature

## Introduction

Excluding the dilation of the origins of the written Albanian language, the most well known authors of the early Albanian literature are: Gjon Buzuku, Pjeter Budi dhe Pjeter Bogdani. “The Missal” by Buzuku is the first book written in Albanian; the beginnings of poetry initiate with Leke Matrenga (of the district of the Arberesh of Italy, 1592) but they become a subject of study for Budi for a longer period of time and the elements of literariness culminate in the work of Bogdani, who recreates based on the biblical theme. All these authors are Catholic missionaries, ( Matrenga, of

the Byzantine rite) and all their works started as translations or free renovations of the religious theme to serve Albanians to pray, or to learn catechism in the Albanian language.

These authors and their works are mentioned in all the anthologies of the Albanian language, regardless of the time when they were published. They are the essence of the early Albanian literature, and this literature has exceeded all expectations and surpassed the mission in relation to which it was born. The study's aim is to analyse this surpass based on the current point of view of literature as literariness and not as ideology.

### **Literary elements in the bibliolatrous works:**

According to Ann Jefferson and David Robey literariness is seen as something that makes the work be considered as literary; according to R. Barthes, literariness is seen as a passion for the language, meaning independence from conscious influence and not a proportion between society and art as history establishes; According to I. Rugova, it is seen as an open door which leads to autonomy and according to S. Hamiti it is seen as subjectivity and not as an indicator. Literariness has been pointed out in these works in relation to:

1. The relative independence that these writings gain from their biblical source.
- 1.1. The first efforts of these early writings to bring biblical narrative in the Albanian language, without a previous tradition, lead to literariness becoming independent, which gives an opportunity for individual choice.

Considering that the early writings around the world display ancient anthems, or have rituals of religious content, it can be stated that their religious theme (including biblical writing) is originally the approach towards the human concern and enigma, that destiny confronts him with. This kind of approach is the earliest and the most present that humanity is aware of; but on the other hand, within the continuance of these writings, the utilitarian and collective function, which consists in having the tendency to store, transmit and utilize the biblical content, is strengthened; whereas literature is an enemy to utilization, it needs freedom and as such it is hostile to firmness or constancy.

We agree with the fact that bibliolatrous literature is similar to authentic literature in the Middle Ages but precisely on account of this it is essential to clarify where this similarity or difference resides. We believe that the elements of the mission may influence the distance between the literary work and bibliolatrous literature, as well as the other phenomena which were mentioned earlier in the passage, may affect their closeness.

To be more precise, we mentioned earlier that bibliolatrous literature reflects profound human approaches, which create literariness. There is evidence showing that biblical approach is a source of spiritual experiences, it is ontology, it is a phenomenology of mysteries and exaltation, it is a source of cosmogony, etc.

We find an approach to literariness in these elements, until the moment when the literary aspect is consolidated, it is therefore structured permanently functioning as a purport which cannot be altered.

Therefore, if we treated the case of the Albanian biblical works diachronically, we would find one of the reasons of their literariness manifested in the first translations of the biblical texts, as a consequence of the lack of formalism. “The Missal” by Buzuku is the first written Albanian book and as such the liberty of the author while translating it was enormous, (compared to translations afterwards). This is why the literary studies on this work, as well as for the early Albanian literature, have been stimulated by thorough and specific language studies. Referring to these studies Çabej reckons that the method of translation that Buzuku used, allows his writing to be sometimes free, also explanatory, lengthened or shortened, and sometimes there were changes trying to achieve a more vivid style also simpler and Albanian soundlike. According to Çabej, this is not an exact version of the work, but it is comprehensible. So Buzuku does not adhere to the biblical scriptures, but surpasses translation as a dogma in the framework of the humanistic ideology to make man aware of the greatness, the power and the mercy of God. Therefore in the introduction of the Missal he states: *being aware that our language does not posses writings of the Holy scriptures, with all the love for our world , I wanted to tell and show, for as much as I can or know, to enlighten the minds and hearts of those who want to hear, tell them so they can understand how great and powerful and merciful is thy God, for thy should love him with all thy heart.*(transliterated by Rexhepi, I. *Old texts*. 2000, pg. 92)

This proportion that he establishes between his writing and the biblical text, (eased by the doubt he expresses in the introduction, making it possible to bring a text of this kind into the Albanian language, taking into account that there is no antecedent) gives to Buzuku and to his work enough freedom that enables an approach to literature. The autonomy given to the work is confined by a slight and delicate line, but when it occurs, the biblical text becomes perceptible to use as a form of literariness, as in Meshari, Feria V, LVII: *To newe glæs is a tradicion for mi blod;*

1.2. The literary work becomes independent. Literariness is perceived as a continuance of this. As a result it is also individualism that characterises it, since it is stimulated as a process of the writing itself. This process initiates a personal relationship between the writer and the writing.

The surpass of the mission is perceived as a manifestation of a distinct way of expressing ideas within a written work when compared with its origin; not just within the concept of translation but also as a complexed relationship with the written work, distinct in codification. (a concept by J.M. Lotman which is cited by Anton Berishaj in “Rethorics and literariness”) which derives from a transmittion of reasoning in a reasoning that belongs to another language.

The approach towards the bible occurs even in the district of the catholics in the north who write in Albanian using the Latin alphabet, also in the district of the Arberesh of Italy ( Leke Matrenga publishes the first arberesh book in Rome, in 1592, the cathecism of a Jesuit, which was written using the southern dialect and the latin alphabet, but which differs from northern earlier authors) and in the district of the orthodox in the south who write in Albanian using the greek alphabet (a pericope of the gospel which is believed to have been written in the XVI century). It was possible for the clerics of the catholic district to write in the Albanian language, as a result of the manifestations of Reform and Anti-reform.

The favoritism of writing in the Albanian language created a possibility for personal subjective approach and reflection. Therefore Buzuku approaches the translation of the Bible with the motivation of knowing the greatness, power and mercy of God, an approach which in itself carries the possibility of creating literariness. Initiating the writing with this motivation gives him the chance to show his individuality and his personal writing skills, as in: Pali talks to the Romans XIII: *Night is gone, day is approaching working on the land we were on the side of the dark labor, and we are covered with a source of light.*

On the contrary Budi establishes a relationship with the biblical scripture changing it into verse; ( but in prose he writes using an oratorical declamation, without being able to approach the art and style of Buzuku); whereas Bogdani strongly aims to write with a deep integrity considering writing equal to thought, the bible as the word of God and the connection of thought with knowledge as eternal. Bogdani states in the introduction of his work that: *That is what the magnificent Saint of the Skies orders, some of the light and grace must be given to man with living words, we should learn from books or writters, by choosing or by listening. (transliterated by Rexhepi, I. Old texts. 2000, pg. 318-319)*

This complexity builds the approach and inner thinking towards the biblical motive and builds the basis of recoding. This is the reason why the prose as well as the poetry of Bogdani are characterised by a higher degree of abstraction.

Therefore all of the three authors mentioned above have their own literary authenticity. A thorough analysis of the recoding of these authors can

be achieved throughout a philological study of their work (lexical, phonetical, etc) which helps us comprehend better, the earlier levels of speech carried in them, the layers of understanding, the distance from being a linguistic unit and the phonetic spelling, etc. These are phenomena that analyse the distance of the language from the direct defining function. The enlightenment of these topics is the enlightenment of literature as a changeable conotation in time and space and the issue of literariness in it.

1.3. Literariness is depicted as a continuance of the relative independence that the writing gains as a result of the profound biblical approach towards man as metaphysics.

The Bible is considered to be inspired by the Holly Spirit as well as literature is considered to be a matter of inspiration, distant from pure reasoning: an issue of the Holly, of Parnas, of Apollo, etc.

Earlier in the passage we showed that the approach towards the Holly books is an approach towards man and his enigma, but on the other hand we said that these contents are put to use as prayers, predication, morality, ect. It can be stated that biblical literature shows literariness when it is relatively independent from the biblical source, when it maintains its mystical essence and recreates new codes on the metaphysical basis, that is to say, somehow when it avoids narrow biblical meanings, even if this is not displayed separately. For instance the motive used by Budi: the sin of man yells at him up high in the sky in front of God, is a metaphorical concept that surpasses the biblical allegory; that is why we say that literary is continuance as much as independence from the biblical code.

In the metaphysics of man it is the one that stands in the roots of the catharsis of Aristotle: the sensation of feeling good when it has witnessed that evil has been punished, or right has been done. The function and the disfunction are inside the catharsis; because it is in within man to search for and feel the right thing, the good and the harmonious and on the opposite it is dialectical for man to crave deep inside of him to find different shapes and different points of view related to justice, ruining an established unity to rebuilt a new order, more complicated than the first, but closer to the complicated human being. That is why literariness cannot endure narrow assumptions. Therefore, when the motive contains this potential of repeating itself, then it carries literariness.

In the metaphysics of man we also find beauty that appears when the greatness, the miracle and the immortality of God are accepted, and that appears when man is aware of his complexed state of being. In one of his poems Budi states: *oh you unfortunate human*.

The human search in having a relationship with God originates in the metaphysics of man. Therefore the concept conserves the mysticalness and the verse of a biblical content becomes multifunctional and holds powerful

and recoding literariness, as shown in another form in the poetry by Bogdani, Sibila Frigjia: *For three periods stays the day darkened by the night/ The sun and the Moon are all covered in blood.*

There is stanza in which Budi performs a monologue with himself expressing his regret for the betrayal and also the materialistic relation of the human with life and introduces the social side of the character in literature as follows in these verses of Bud: *For thirty denarius/ Oh let them be cursed/ Who made me accept it/ I will be punished.*

In the verses where Maria laments and cries there is beauty which subjectifies her personal relation with the deep human sufferings.

1.4. Literariness is depicted as a continuance of the relative independence that the writing gains, trying to pay attention to the language ( since it is the substance that builds literariness) the independence it achieves as metalanguage.

It is fascinating how much attraction there is by authors of the early literature towards the texts of the Bible ( but not only by these authors because this phenomenon continues to be present in the three literary circles of the Albanian language until the XIX century).

The evaluation of the work and outlook of these authors is done considering the influence of the humanistic ideology and Renaissance, which implies the evaluation of man and all their features. In this context we have interpreted the words of Bogdani taken from the introduction of his work “The platoon of the prophets”: *do not leave the known and the language of the land to be forgotten or neglected, for the whole world throughout time fights for oneself, therefore it rises and grows because of wisdom .*

Thus we do not just conceptualize as coincidence, the fact that Budi gathers the pastors to make them bind by oath, not to accept clergyman that do not speak Albanian, and it is not coincidental that the letters written to Cardinal Gocadin show the awareness of Budi to ask for clergyman that know the language; and this is not mere awareness, but a profound knowledge vulnerable towards the spiritual needs of the human being. Budi expresses this using words such as: *For devotion something should be done or told.*

If we do not consider it on the context of ideology, we would prefer to state that the linguistic matter comes from the inside; in the zeal of communication we understand that the fluent inner part ( transcendental) of the Albanian writer is found within the missionar.

An example of this is clearly articulated in the introduction of Bogdani, when he says: *When I have had the desire to bring something into light with my writing, I have done this because I have strongly wanted to do so, more than just for the light of the holly spirit.*

It is not simple to show what is essential and important in the process of using the Albanian language: the religious mission, the feeling of how to conceptualize in Albanian, the individual communication that needs to be given or any other aspects. The answer is veiled, but also complexly structured within the text and needs to be undertaken a thorough analysis.

The affection towards the language was inspirational: the word had the power to discover divine mystery. The first was the word, states the Bible; and when we consider the word ( in this case the Albanian language) , we mean a complex institution, which according to modern cultural anthropology, displays the ongoing work of the soul that has a voice and changes while expressing thought, and which is closely connected with the country it belongs to. Therefore we talk about literariness belonging to Albanians, as an ethnical linguistic core, but also as a self individual expression. This can be a point of research to find out more about the parallelism between the works of Barleti and Buzuku, as scholar Fatbardha Hoxha affirms that Buzuku as well as Barleti *had a thorough knowledge of their ethnicity.*(Hoxha, F. 2013)

Selman Riza entitles this process as a linguistic nationalization of the church; Shaban Sinani as a supremacy towards the traditional complex of inferiority in the presence of language as a monopoly of the word of God and the expression of faith in the native words, but from a linguistic point of view it is more than that.

When we claim that literacy is based on the abilities of the language, we mean the choices that come by the desire to bring a text, to be sensitive, a good level of communication, individuality; these choices are brought to the reader as literary flow, a polisemantic and abstract potential, an independent way of thinking, as unique phonetic constructions of rhythm, rhyme, as a foundation of styles, etc. The need for such a sensitive use of the language, gave birth to literature beyond translation. So, that is why the literary aspect of the bibliolatrous works, does not have an informative and religious aim; it is possible to be understood because of the tension implied by the use of the language.

Thus, the literary colors and shapes of the works of Buzuku, are sometimes impressive. The transcendency of the linguistic expressions that display intimacy, mysticism and peace is impressive, and so is the independence of the phonetic sound, depending on the emotional state of the passage. The choices come as a result of the sensitivity and the ability of the writer to express his ideas, but also as a result of the writer's intentions, which also implies his cultural and mental knowledge.

Bogdani was really creative with the language, which was possible because of his awareness and knowledge of the art of writing, as well as his sensitivity and wide linguistic knowledge, and his cultural awareness,

including his talent. In the texts Bogdani translates, considering him a personality in the field, the word he uses searches and gains dimensions that create illusions and a dynamic structure of relations , such as in these verses: *The waters somewhere flow like fontaines of blood, the voice echoes in the mountains and screams throughout the desert, it brings good news and it shows the right path.*

We think that the difference between literariness and didascal literature in the biblical writings can be given within the raport of language as being strict with figures( the parable, the metaphor, the symbol) within the text, if we consider it as a closed circle; in being purgatorial, didactical, practical, normatively ritualistic;

In this kind of literature the matter of language as metalanguage is a matter of relations between structural layers, it is a matter of conventions and their surpass, it is a matter of linguistic symbolism and its surpass, it is a matter of the text as a whole structure conceptualized as a great symbol.

2. In these literary works we perceive literariness as a matter of research or study of new forms of expression: in poetry, verses, rythm, rhyme...

In bibliolatrous literature we find different types of stanza that was used in literature for the first time. Thus in the literary works of Budi we have poetry similar to folkloric poems, but also a combination of the trochaic and iambic verse; whereas Bogdani comes with a type of poetry where the meaning goes beyond verse and acts as connection, a phenomenon that introduces the free verse in poetry.

In relation to this matter Robert Elsie says: *It is the catholic literature..... the one that helps changing the Albanian language, from a language able to be written, into a literary means able to be artistically expressive and to have different styles. (Robert, E. 1997)*

3. Literariness is seen as a potential of the biblical codes, which could influence on all the later Albanian literary works.

The gnoseological theme, the abstract metaphysical thought, the conception and the mystical spirit are some of the characteristics of the biblical poetry , which not only surpasses its mission but also influences on the later Albanian literature. It has also influenced on the relation between the past and the present literature providing it with codes that turned into elements of structure.

The mythological and poetical potential of the biblical codes have had a great influence on the Albanian writters of Romanticism, who gave spiritualism to the movement of the National Renaissance ( as a metaphysics of man and God) , it has influenced the emergence of neoclassicism, realism, modernism and postmodernism in the Albanian literature. The biblical codes continue to be active nowadays, in the latest works published by Albanian writters.



## Conclusion

We have given the emergence of literariness in the main three authors of bibliolatrous works of the earlier Albanian literature, independently from their status as writers (interpreter, text editor, author) and we have pointed out that their literariness is connected to the holy biblical texts, as well as it is independent from it.

To summarize we have found literariness in the biblical texts seen as eternal, as a potential compound by many layers, whereas the independence that the literary work has gained within these writings, was seen connected with the inner side of the writer as well as with the individual and national approach to the work. It was also connected to the power, the strength and deep thought the literary work gained while being used.

Therefore, by studying the emergence of literariness from the biblical literature, this article depicts literature as art synchronizing it with the dialectical forms it has shown, narrowing the gap between the concept of the religious theme and the laical one and by showing us that literariness is the mystical that constantly exceeds all expectations.

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